

Welcoming Remarks at a Presentation by

Dr. M.S. Swaminathan

14th Floor, IDRC

July 13, 2007

Maureen O'Neil

President, International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

[** NOTE THAT THERE IS SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION **]

Bienvenue, Mesdames et Messieurs.

C'est avec grand plaisir que nous accueillons aujourd'hui quelqu'un qui a eu un impact profond sur le monde entier. Pour le magazine *Time*, c'est, en fait, l'un des vingt hommes les plus influents du vingtième siècle en Asie. En effet, son influence peut être sentie dans toutes les zones rurales des régions du monde.

During the 1960s, many experts were making dire Malthusian predictions based on Asia's immense demographic growth. Agriculture could never keep up with the growing need to feed so many.

Armed with a PhD in plant genetics from Cambridge, a young and motivated researcher from Tamil Nadu felt compelled to seek out a solution. He brought into India seeds developed in Mexico by U.S. agricultural guru Norman Borlaug and, after cross-breeding them with local species, created a high-yielding wheat plant. The process was then replicated for other grains, notably rice. The Green revolution was born, and Asia went from being a Malthusian nightmare, to the economic boomtown we all know well.

That young researcher was Dr. Monkombu Sambasivan Swaminathan — “the professor”, as his colleagues call him. Luckily for us, he strayed from his original intention to become a police officer! Thus, the Indian police force's loss has become the international development world's bountiful gain.

Durant les années quatre-vingt-dix, le docteur Swaminathan a commencé à se pencher sur la question de la révolution numérique et des bénéfices dont les communautés rurales pourraient en tirer. L'information et la communication sont, en effet, des éléments clés d'un meilleur bien-être pour les agriculteurs. C'est à ce moment que le professeur s'est tissé des liens avec le CRDI.

Through IDRC, CIDA, and other donor support, Dr. Swaminathan's research foundation in Chennai developed several « village knowledge centres », believing that a well-placed computer, like a communal well, could be a valuable tool for development. The centres are, in fact, making livelihoods more secure, sustainable, and safe by equipping villagers with the means and

motivation to access knowledge and to develop new skills. For example, fishers get accurate information on sea conditions before setting out in their wooden boats – proven to be lifesaving information for many. In fact, on the 26th of December 2004, a village knowledge centre in Pondicherry was used to blare out warnings of the impending Asian tsunami. As a result, all villagers made it to safety and no lives were lost.

The Knowledge Centre project led to the “National Alliance for Mission 2007”, a grassroots movement to bring the benefits of the knowledge revolution to 600 000 villages, by replicating the original centres across India. The idea was so influential that the Government of India committed the equivalent of CA\$28 million to this initiative in its March 2005 national budget and IDRC helped support Mission 2007’s implementation.

At present, Dr. Swaminathan is the President of the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences and of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, and Chairman of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation. Recently, as the Chairman of the National Commission on Farmers, he submitted five voluminous reports on the state of Indian agriculture, suggesting the enactment of a Food Guarantee Act.

Dr. Swaminathan’s impressive work to date shows no sign of losing momentum. The 81-years “young” MP is now looking forward to a new career in Parliament, and hopes to interact fruitfully with the country’s lawmakers.

Mesdames et messieurs, ... le jeune professeur Swaminathan!